

Borough of Quakertown

Planning Commission Meeting

September 8, 2014

At

7:00pm at Borough Office

BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Jon Roth – Chairman

Fred Tirjan – Vice Chairman

Cathy Gillahan - Secretary

Michael Orzel

William Kee

Michele Scarborough

Philip Abramson

Ronald Heller

Michael Haywood -*Absent*

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Douglas Wilhelm, Building Code Officer

Cheryleen Strothers- Engineer of Cowan & Associates

Katherine Renner - Recording Secretary

PROCEEDINGS:

Meeting called to order at 7:00pm by Jon Roth – Chairman.

MINUTES:

The approval of July 14, 2014 meeting minutes were approved with a motion made by Ronald Heller, and Seconded by Michele Scarborough and was unanimously carried to approve the July 14, 2014, minutes as written with 2 abstentions from William Kee & Cathy Gillahan since they were absent from July's meeting.

AGENDA:

Ariel Concept plan of Sotel Property, located at 105 E. Mill Street, Quakertown, with TMP# 35-009-15-2.

Jon Roth asked Ken Bissinger of the firm of Renewed Design Group to start the presentation of the review of the Ariel Concept plan of Sotel Property, proposed development for construction of twenty-four (24) garden apartments intended for senior housing located at 105 E. Mill Street, Quakertown, with TMP# 35-009-15-2.

Renewed Design Group is a land development specialist, Civil Engineer, also architectural landscaping firm. A big part of what we do is senior housing, along with some educational & institutional buildings and have zeroed in on this property of 105 E. Mill Street, mostly because it is in the Borough and along with this being a different type of a concept in senior housing. Tonight we arrived a little early and over heard some of your discussion on how expensive the senior housing is around this area. When people have to go into a continual care facility like Souderton Mennonite Home or Rockhill Mennonite Home or many of the others around this area are known for charging a hefty entrance fee to get into these places and some have other fees that end up taking most of the monthly income. We have been very involved with that over the years and watched it become very unaffordable for most people in today's market. So what the Renewed Design Group is doing is trying to combine all the plusses of the senior facilities and we converge with Mock Shounabelle from the Netherlands, who is present tonight. He has been living in the United States, in the Bethlehem area for the past 25 years and has brought with him a lot of the concepts that are being used for senior housing in the Netherlands today. The Netherlands are very socialized with their senior housing where here in the U.S. we are not. We are trying to bring the positives from the Netherlands and bring it into our culture and market with the biggest thing is no entrance fees. It is geared to be affordable which is why we chose the place in Quakertown. Like Quakertown and its surrounding areas all have the affordability concept in mind.

Renewed Design Group has come up with a concept of 24 units that is designed around a court yard mostly for security. We tried to make the court yard area as the gathering area for these people, much like a cafeteria would in the other type homes, where the activities are taking place and the plus side is that you will be able to see all of your neighbors and what's going on in the court yard. It also helps with the social aspect, you will be more likely to go to the court yard if you see others there doing things and having a good time. Also it can help build the sense of community within the community of Quakertown. If you don't see a neighbor for a day or so, you will be more likely to go over and check on that neighbor to make sure everything is okay. It really helps the people with age and place. From what we have found out, is most people would like to be able to stay in their home that they have had for a while or move into a place that they feel it is more of a comfortable home than just a room with all their belongings crammed into a closet because they have to share the room with someone they have never met before.

We have tried to create a community where they are comfortable in a home setting plus can look out and help take care of their neighbors for as long as they can.

Another option that we will be offering there, are many different organization out there where they will offer services in the home to aid & assist you in the home if you and or your neighbor can not any more. Our thinking for the senior housing will be with an age limit of 62 and older.

That is basically the overall concept of what this is all about for senior housing, specifically on the drawing the only way in is off of Mill St. We have created a 24 foot drive way as the entrance, two residential dwellings are close on the entrance part of the driveway and we are going to try to move the driveway over to create as much site distance as we can. We do feel that could be an issue and want to look at that more closely. We are dealing with the backs of the properties on N. Hellertown Ave, which they will be granted access to that driveway but will create a buffer that won't expose the garages and draw your eye more towards the building. We are proposing a one way traffic pattern around the facility but not completely sure which direction around the building as of yet. We are showing angled parking to minimize the black top and width. There is a covered car space for each resident, one covered parking space per unit, also considering an option for green roofs on top of the covered car space.

We initially figured two story units in the back with the one story towards the front that will also help to cover the storage units behind this property. There will be gates between the buildings, card swipes will be the only way to be able to get in and with the front doors facing the court yard will add the extra security with neighbors being able to see who is visiting or who is leaving.

Cheryleen pointed out to us that Quakertown's ordinance allows 6 units per dwelling; we are showing 8 units for the two story dwellings. Obviously we will make those adjustments that are needed. We wanted to keep the one story dwelling so you can see into community as you approach it. There will also be a small community building internally mostly for activities. It will be heavily landscaped with possibly some kind of water feature. There will be mostly being one bedroom units, a couple of two bedroom units and a few smaller one bedrooms. There will be public water and sewer. Architecturally want to relate to what Quakertown Borough styles, brick and stone visual styles.

Michele Scarborough wanted to know if this was the same property that was requesting townhomes and everyone stated yes.

Michele Scarborough asked the question about the parking for guests. Will there be outside workers coming into this community, if so where they will be able to park.

If there is a family party where will the guest park at? There doesn't look like there will be enough for the outside guests to park there, Michele Scarborough indicated.

We are showing 1.5 parking spaces per unit that typically works for these types of units. All the covered parking is for the units but all the uncovered parking is available for guests to use.

Jon Roth asked if Cheryleen could go over her comments she sent Doug. Cheryleen stated that it is just a quick review of the concept because there is not a lot on the conceptual plan itself. The use, the multi-family use is permitted by conditional use so it would have to go before the council for a conditional use hearing. It is also in the pedestrian oriental mixed use over lay district. There is a lot of design criteria that needs to be met which also is included in my letter. Realistically I don't feel like it will be a problem for them as far as the design criteria. He already mentioned the 6 units per building that is a zoning requirement there for if they want to go with 8 units they

will have to go before the zoning hearing board. As far as lot area, there is a requirement of 1500 per dwelling unit; they will have to show how they are meeting that, once again I don't feel that will be an issue.

This property is in an industrial district which is allowable use. It is compatible with uses in the area.

Traffic visibility has been discussed and with regards to parking, in our ordinance that says parking for the elderly is .5 spaces per dwelling unit, which is not out of the norm for a Borough.

There is a contradiction on the elderly housing, 55 + housing and senior housing, are they considered all the same, it could be challenged that a half a space per dwelling unit is enough. Quakertown's ordinance dictates that usually it is 2 parking spaces per dwelling unit.

Renewed Design Group went with 1.5 spaces per dwelling unit as I also used that number in the past for senior housing /55 + housing. Studies show that it is usually 1.2 parking spaces per dwelling unit that always worked well, as for the over flow parking, there was always more than enough in past housing projects but one can never really tell.

Senior housing is more of assisted living than a 55+ community. There are few that actually own vehicles.

A question by Jon Roth was asked about a deed restriction on age restrictions. Basically one of the owners of those units has to be of the property age to be able to live in those places. As for children, grandchildren coming over to stay for a visit, they are limitations on the time and length of the visits. There is a covenant that states those things but who is to say that covenant can or cannot be removed and when.

Jon Roth states his concerns are if these streets will stay private, the driveway and the road all the way around the area will not be wide enough for emergency vehicles; fire trucks to maneuver around the corners yet alone having someone parked illegally. But I do really like the whole concept of this is.

Mr. Bissinger interjected with the turning radius around the building is about a 40 foot radius but then again that can be changed to increase the radius if need be. This is a conceptual plan and we can explore different options that will be in agreeances with what the Borough wants or needs.

Ron Heller asked what the turning radius is and Douglas Wilhelm indicated that it would depend on the type of fire truck but most of time when the Townships/Boroughs involve the emergency vehicles; we always use the 24 foot car path as the base amount with no parking on either side due to worrying about the front & back overhangs of the vehicles.

The Renewed Group Firm came here tonight with a rough sketch to see if Quakertown Borough would even entertain this concept and to gather the information from the concerns all of you are expressing and then go back to do some reconfiguring and when we do return we will have addressed all the concerns and or problems with more defined detailed engineered drawings.

The general census is the Planning Commission Board members all like the idea and the concept of the plan. With some changes and more concrete plans, when this comes back to the Planning Commission it should be a more relax and meaningful decision to be made since all the minor and some major details are already worked out.

Mr. Wilhelm voiced that what we are trying to do and trying to continue to proceed to do in the future, is to come in with the conceptual idea to get the feelings from the Planning Commission Board members, so they can go work on the design, put their money out where they need to, to come back to get the final approval. That is what I talked about with the Renewed Design Group before so they could get the feel of what was the general thought on this before they jumped in too far.

Jon Roth said instead of taking a formal vote asked if they would go around the table and have each member to voice their opinion on how they feel about this concept plan so the Renewed Design Group knows how to precede. With myself stating, I am perfectly comfortable with this, I like the idea.

Cathy Gillahan - I really like this idea

Michele Scarborough – I also like this idea, much better than the townhomes.

Ron Heller – feels it is too much for the amount of space that is available.

Michael Orzel - I feel it will work.

Fred Tirjan - I too like the concept but am also worried about the amount on this property.

Mr. Phillips, developer, addressed the members; he retired from the ministry back in 2010, while Pasturing in a church also sold real estate with Cold Well Bankers. During my time as an agent, he heard over and over from the residents of Quakertown something needs to be done for the elderly people of this community. Now you have a chance to do something and get involved in this. When this first was brought to me, I wasn't sure and the more he looked into this the more sense it made to me. Why didn't someone think of this before, think about it in terms of the elderly, this concept comes from the Netherlands, idea is you live together and die together in lieu of going into a nursing home being separated from your spouse and die alone, where in these homes, can be transformed to help you/your spouse stay with you/your spouse until they die.

Jon Roth went on to the next item of the agenda of old business, the sign ordinance but could be dropped due to the information was found and no longer needed brought up again. Doug explained that seeing the mountains of dirt from Walgreens looks like things are moving along. Permits are issued and they are working towards each phase. The high school is moving along got all there required Use & Occupancy permits that were required for the school to be able to open. The foot ball field will hold its first game on September 19, 2014.

No new business to discuss.

Mr. Ron Heller made the motion with Mrs. Michele Scarborough to second to adjourn this meeting.

The next regular meeting will be held on Oct 13, 2014.

Recording Secretary: *Katherine Renner*